United Nations PBC/4/CAF/1

General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.: General
17 December 2009

Original: English

Peacebuilding Commission
Fourth session
Central African Republic configuration

Report of the Peacebuilding Commission mission to the Central African Republic, 3-10 December 2009

Summary

The Peacebuilding Commission undertook a mission to the Central African Republic from 3 to 10 December 2009. The delegation was headed by Jan Grauls, Chairperson of the Central African Republic configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission. The key findings of the delegation are summarized below.

Key findings

Inclusive political dialogue

Implementation of the recommendations of the inclusive political dialogue is slow, but some notable achievements have been made.

Security sector reform and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration

Developments in the area of security sector reform are encouraging. The Government has demonstrated real ownership in the implementation of short-term commitments in the field of security sector reform.

The security sector reform round table allowed for the authorities of the Central African Republic to agree on a security sector reform strategy with the international community, a significant achievement. While no pledges were made, the Peacebuilding Commission has stated its willingness to organize, sometime in 2010, a donors' round table to mobilize resources for the 24 projects amounting to US$ 102 million.

Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration is technically ready to start, but continues to be hampered by political and security challenges under the responsibility of the Government and representatives of rebel groups.

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The finalization of a cooperation agreement with the Economic Community of Central African States has removed the last remaining stumbling block.

The international community has fully lived up to its responsibilities in terms of funding and technical preparation of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process. The responsibility for the successful completion of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration now lies with the national authorities.

Good governance and rule of law

Notable progress has been achieved in the lead-up to the 2010 elections, including the revision of the electoral code and the establishment of the Independent Electoral Commission.

Much remains to be done, notably in the field of human rights and management of natural resources.

Capacity must be strengthened at all levels, particularly as the Government resumes its functions throughout the whole country.

The adoption of the revised mining code represents another setback to the transparent management of natural resources and the equitable distribution of related state incomes, despite the country's adherence to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI).

Development Hubs

The Development Hubs project has yet to start in earnest, although the mapping of the specific needs for each pole has been completed by the United Nations Human Settlements Programme.

There is a need for the Government to take strong ownership of the project.

Infrastructure reconstruction, particularly of the road network through public employment programmes, will contribute to the early success of the development poles project.

I. Introduction

1. The key purposes of the mission were:

(a) To continue the engagement with the Government of the Central African Republic and other key national and international stakeholders;

(b) To assess, with the Government and other stakeholders, progress made in delivering commitments made by the Government, the civil society and the international community, as represented by the Peacebuilding Commission, in support of the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic, 2009-2011, adopted on 6 May 2009 (PBC/3/CAF/7). This constitutes the first biannual review of the Strategic Framework, six months after its adoption;

(c) To visit sites of ongoing projects in and outside of Bangui that are relevant to peacebuilding in the country;

(d) To exchange views on the activities of the Peacebuilding Fund with the National Steering Committee, with a view to finalizing the process for the second allocation from the Fund.

The terms of reference of the mission, the composition of the delegation and the programme of the visit are contained in annexes I and II.

2. The delegation had meetings with the First Deputy Speaker of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, the Minister of State for Planning, the Economy and International Cooperation, the Minister of Communication, Reconciliation and Follow-up to the Inclusive Political Dialogue, the Deputy Minister of Defence, the Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Follow-up Committee to the Inclusive Political Dialogue, the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Steering Committee, the National Peacebuilding Fund Steering Committee, civil society organizations, the partner's coordination group, the United Nations country team, the United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office in the Central African Republic (BONUCA) and the diplomatic community, and held a press conference. The delegation also had an exchange of views with an Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) mission on the key findings of its visit.

3. The delegation travelled to Paoua in the north-west and to Berengo near the capital, Bangui, which was useful to assess the situation outside of Bangui and to meet with the local community and members of the international community, including the United Nations system and representatives of international non-governmental organizations in the field. In Paoua the delegation visited ongoing projects funded with the support of the Peacebuilding Fund. These trips were particularly relevant since one of the country's challenges is the relative absence of state presence and authority outside of Bangui. The field trips also highlighted the country's decrepit infrastructure, such as roads and power plants, as well as the impoverished living conditions of the population outside of the capital.

4. The Chair and his team wish to convey their appreciation to the Government of the Central African Republic and to BONUCA for their hospitability and most useful assistance during the mission.

II. Main findings and key issues

5. Expectations have risen considerably in the context of the discussions related to the country's second allocation from the Peacebuilding Fund, but also with respect to the Peacebuilding Commission's role in mobilizing resources and international attention to the needs of the Central African Republic. As in the past, however, the relationship between the activities of the Fund and those of the Commission remains a source of confusion for many interlocutors. At each opportunity, the delegation attempted to clarify the difference between the Peacebuilding Commission and the Peacebuilding Fund.

6. The unfortunate postponement of the decision on a second allocation from the Peacebuilding Fund for the Central African Republic has aversely affected the impact of the Peacebuilding Commission mission and might have created a sense of disappointment on the part of the Government. A technical mission from the Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO) was dispatched with the aim of gathering additional information to proceed with a swift decision on the amount of the second allocation before the end of the year.

7. The delegation emphasized that the primary responsibility rests with the Government for achieving progress on the three priorities for peacebuilding: security sector reform (including disarmament, demobilization and reintegration), the rule of law and good governance, and the establishment of development poles. The delegation also stressed the paramount importance of holding the 2010 general elections within the constitutional time frame. The delegation was of the view that security throughout the territory of the Central African Republic was a precondition for the holding of free and fair elections.

Security sector reform

8. In the area of security sector reform, the delegation stressed the importance of establishing a solid link between the ongoing disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme and the overall security sector reform project. Considerable progress has been achieved in the short-term objectives of the security sector reform timetable, largely owing to the Government's demonstrated ownership of the project, both at the technical and political levels. However, the international round table held at the end of October 2009 in Bangui bore disappointing results. Besides agreeing on an overall strategy for security sector reform between the national counterparts and the international community, the round table did not yield any new pledges from the international community beyond what was already planned. The 24 projects submitted to the international community for funding amount to US$ 102 million.

9. Regarding disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, the delegation was able to ascertain that from a technical point of view, the project was ready to be launched. With the agreement signed between the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS) and BONUCA (in its capacity as Chair of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Steering Committee), the issue of the military observers had been solved. Most of the military observers arrived in Bangui while the Peacebuilding Commission delegation was there. They were bound for deployment by 15 December 2009, once they had received additional training in Bangui to bring them up to speed with the specificities of the Central

African Republic. The delegation was pleased to see that despite some slowness in the beginning of the process, the last few months had seen a gradual speeding up of the preparations for disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, and that now, the only remaining obstacles seemed to be of political nature, which lay squarely within the responsibility of the national authorities. Some of these obstacles were the so-called "*préalables*", a set of preconditions by ex-combatants related to security in their respective zones and the Government's promise to handle the activities of various other groups such as the *coupeurs de route* (zaraguinas) and *groupes d'auto-défense* (self-defence groups).

10. It was also confirmed that funding for the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme was fully secured through contributions from the Peacebuilding Fund, the European Commission, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Government of the Central African Republic, which received a contribution from the Communauté économique et monétaire de l'Afrique centrale (CEMAC).

11. The delegation expressed its concern in the light of the recent security incidents in N'Délé and Birao, including the kidnapping of international humanitarian workers. The fighting surrounding N'Délé was seen as posturing by rebel groups who have not joined in the peace process, following the end of the rainy season, and with the start of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration fast approaching. In this regard, while visiting Paoua, the delegation was prevented from accessing the site of a Peacebuilding Fund-funded project for child soldiers, by armed elements of the Armée populaire pour la restauration de la république et la démocratie (APRD), one of the main ex-rebel groups, supposedly on the grounds that the local group leader had not been informed appropriately of the arrival of the delegation. This incident, too, should be considered as a poor attempt at posturing, as the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process has not quite started yet. The APRD leader in Bangui, a member of the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Steering Committee, blamed the incident on a communication glitch.

12. With respect to the Government's and other contributions to the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme that have not been channelled through the UNDP Trust Fund, a parallel mechanism has been provided for in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration project document to ensure transparency and accountability in the use of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration funds.

Good governance and the rule of law

13. Good governance and the rule of law remain high on the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission. While the attention of the Commission has focused on other priorities over the past six months, the delegation took the opportunity of the visit to stress that in the forthcoming months, its attention would focus on good governance and the rule of law. This attention was particularly important as the country had now entered the pre-electoral phase. The Peacebuilding Commission delegation was able to meet with representatives of the recently appointed Independent Electoral Commission (IEC). It emerged from that and other meetings that IEC suffers from weak infrastructural means (the Commission is currently located in the National Assembly building and shares the Assembly's assets, which

are limited) and a lack of technical capacity for the preparation of elections. While representative of all the entities that participated in the inclusive political dialogue, IEC has a large membership of 31 representatives. Also, it is struggling to get started on work because of a lack of logistical equipment, cars, offices, computers and so forth. IEC has yet to start preparing an electoral list and a timetable for the different stages of the electoral process. The delegation was pleased, however, to see that some developments have been made, including the adoption of the revised electoral code and the provision of budgets for the Government's contribution to the organization of the elections for the 2009 and 2010 budgets. The delegation noted with concern, however, that there was no unanimous push from all relevant stakeholders to hold the elections within the time frames envisaged by the Constitution. Several interlocutors indicated their flexibility regarding the final dates for the elections, depending on such issues as overall security situations, the completion of the disarmament and demobilization phases of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process, and some tendency to interpret more vaguely the provisions of the Constitution. A unanimous interpretation of the Constitution as to when the current legislative mandate expires varies from one interlocutor to the other. The question will need to be addressed sooner rather than later by the country's constitutional court.

14. The adherence of the Central African Republic to the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) is a positive and encouraging development, despite concerns raised with the adoption of the revised mining code. The delegation stressed the importance in the coming months of supporting more robustly the Prime Minister's initiative to combat corruption in the Central African Republic.

15. Another positive development for the Central African Republic was the achievement of the Enhanced Heavily Indebted Poor Countries' Initiative (HIPC) completion point, which led to the cancellation of a large part of the country's debts. The relief of the country's debt burden has in turn resulted in the payment of several months of salary arrears. To reach the completion point, the Central African Republic took a number of measures aimed at preparing and implementing a national poverty reduction strategy and maintaining a stable macroeconomic environment. Other progress in the field of good governance and the rule of law is related to the implementation of measures in the area of transparency, structural reforms in the forestry and mining sectors, civil service reform, public debt management, social sectors and HIV.

16. With respect to the country's revenue base, the delegation heard that the global economic and financial crisis has had a negative impact on the Government's income. The Peacebuilding Commission has indicated its commitment to addressing the adverse impact of the global crisis on countries such as the Central African Republic, which are hardest hit by the crisis. The Peacebuilding Commission delegation also stressed the importance of focusing its attention in the coming months on the development of income-generating activities, particularly in those areas hardest hit by the conflict.

Development poles

17. With respect to the establishment of development poles, the delegation was informed that 2010 would see the start of the implementation of the project. The European Commission has already set aside a considerable amount of funding to

quick-start the project, but considerable amounts of additional resources will be needed to see the project completed. The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) has completed the needs assessment study (*monographies*) for the first nine development hubs. The studies are still being revised. The concept of development poles has been fully endorsed by the Government of the Central African Republic in its national poverty reduction strategy ("Document de stratégie de réduction de la pauvreté"), but the Government has yet to establish a technical committee to take charge of the programme and ensure its full ownership. The European Commission is fully committed to provide the initial funding necessary for the establishment of the development hubs, but considerably more funding will be required from other bilateral and multilateral partners. It was noted, however, that the development hubs project should be considered as an additional initiative by the international community in the area of community development, which complements ongoing and planned development activities and projects by other partners, notably the United Nations system in the Central African Republic.

III. Concluding observations

18. The delegation stressed the importance of achieving progress simultaneously on the three priorities identified in the country's Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding. The inherent interconnection among and between the three priorities became increasingly obvious as the country approaches important milestones on the road to peace consolidation. The importance of starting and possibly completing the disarmament and demobilization of the country's disarmament, demobilization and reintegration project before the elections are to take place next year is paramount. But in order to start disarmament, demobilization and reintegration, some preconditions, of a political and security nature, are necessary. The political responsibility lies in this regard with the Government and links up directly with the recommendations of the inclusive political dialogue, while the security aspects link up with the overall security sector reform process in the country.

19. With respect to security sector reform, the delegation recognized the important efforts by the Government, supported by the international community, in addressing the short-term elements of the country's security sector reform timetable. The delegation has agreed to work with the Government to identify the appropriate timing for a donors' round table in 2010, to support the Government in mobilizing the necessary resources for the projects submitted to the international community in Bangui at the end of October.

20. Elections are part and parcel of the good governance and rule of law element of the Strategic Framework. However, the weakness of the State presence beyond Bangui, and in particular of the necessary administrative functions of the national authority, may have an adverse effect on the electoral process. The development hubs project is one element of the solution, which aims at re-establishing the State's presence throughout the territory by providing basic social and administrative functions. The establishment of the development hubs, however, will be hampered if significant advances are not made in the areas of security sector reform and rule of law and good governance, in particular with a view to creating an enabling environment conducive to attracting foreign private investment at a time when the global economy has markedly slowed down. The delegation realized the particular

challenge the Peacebuilding Commission will continue to face in the Central African Republic to coordinate the action of all relevant stakeholders to ensure not only progress, but also careful sequencing of the various actions and projects, ongoing and planned.

21. The delegation made extensive contacts with a wide range of actors on the ground covering all parts of society, including the political leaders, the Independent Electoral Commission, civil society, as well as the international community on the ground, both bilateral and multilateral donors and actors, including the United Nations system. The goals of the mission, as laid out in its terms of reference, were fully met.

22. The visit by the Peacebuilding Commission delegation to the Central African Republic proved once more the usefulness of such visits to the field, where the Commission can learn from a wide diversity of viewpoints. The visit allowed for members of the delegation to gain a better understanding of the country's challenges as they relate to peacebuilding. Furthermore, beyond seeing the situation in the capital, Bangui, the visits to other areas of the country, in particular the north-west (Paoua), allowed the delegation to assess the conditions outside the capital.

23. The delegation gained a better sense of the importance of the establishment, in January 2010, of the new United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in the Central African Republic (BINUCA), to replace the current mission, BONUCA. Increased coordination between the activities of the political, development and humanitarian branches of the United Nations presence on the ground has been strongly supported by the Peacebuilding Commission delegation and will have a catalytic effect on the activities of the United Nations presence on the ground. The inclusion in the mandate of the new mission of a support role to the activities of the Peacebuilding Commission will also facilitate the interaction between the Commission in New York and the United Nations presence on the ground.

Annex I

Note on the field visit of the Peacebuilding Commission to the Central African Republic (3-10 December 2009): objectives and key messages

I. Objectives of the visit

1. For the Peacebuilding Commission delegation, the purposes of the mission will be:

(a) To continue the engagement with the Government of the Central African Republic and other key national and international stakeholders;

(b) With the Government and other stakeholders, to assess progress made in delivering commitments made by the Government, the civil society and the international community, as represented by the Peacebuilding Commission, in support of the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic, adopted on 6 May 2009. This constitutes the first biannual review of the Strategic Framework, six months after its adoption;

(c) To visit sites of ongoing projects in and outside of Bangui that are relevant to peacebuilding in the country;

(d) To exchange views on the activities of the Peacebuilding Fund with the National Steering Committee, with a view to finalizing the process for the second allocation from the Fund.

II. Key messages

A. Overall progress in the peacebuilding process in the Central African Republic

2. Since the referral of the Central African Republic to the agenda of the Peacebuilding Commission, we have worked hard together to identify the country's peacebuilding priorities and we have adopted a Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in the country. What is your assessment of the implementation of the Strategic Framework, and of the partnership between the Peacebuilding Commission and the country?

3. Since the adoption of the Strategic Framework, progress has been made on various fronts. In your view, what are the areas we should focus on primarily in the coming six months, how do you intend to go about it, and how can the Peacebuilding Commission support your efforts?

4. The coming months will be critical in the country's peacebuilding process, including the successful completion of the country's disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and the holding of national elections.

5. The inclusive political dialogue has been indeed very inclusive of all parts of society. This inclusiveness is key for peacebuilding, and the Peacebuilding

Commission encourages all stakeholders to continue to be part of the process in the context of the follow-up to the dialogue.

6. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration has to start imminently. The Peacebuilding Commission recognizes the sensitivities surrounding the negotiations on the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration project document and takes note of the sensitization campaign organized by the Government. Disarmament and demobilization of ex-rebels has to start and be completed to ensure that the necessary conditions are in place to hold the national elections by the time stipulated in the country's Constitution.

7. Holding of the elections within the constitutional calendar is a primordial condition for the country's continued progress on the path of peacebuilding. The Peacebuilding Commission welcomes the establishment of the Independent Electoral Commission and looks forward to seeing the timetable that will be elaborated. The continued support of the international community depends on the holding of these elections. The Commission awaits the final budget estimate for elections to play its role in mobilizing resources for elections through the UNDP basket fund.

8. Progress in the implementation of the development hubs projects needs to be accelerated. It is important that this project should start in earnest very soon, in the light of the interconnectedness with the reintegration element of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration and the crucial signs it will send to revitalizing communities affected by conflicts.

9. Peacebuilding is firmly vested in the hands of the Government and the people of the Central African Republic. The Peacebuilding Commission reaffirms its commitment to support these efforts. While the availability of financial resources is an indispensable component of peacebuilding, it is not the only one that can assure progress is achieved.

B. Biannual review of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding in the Central African Republic

10. The Peacebuilding Commission has concluded a first review of the commitments it made in the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding and is eagerly awaiting the conclusion of the parallel process in Bangui, to review the Government's and civil society commitments. The resulting set of conclusions and recommendations should inform our respective actions for the coming six months, until the next biannual review.

C. Relation between the Strategic Framework and the disbursement from the Peacebuilding Fund

11. After the adoption of our Strategic Framework document (PBC/3/CAF/7), the Peacebuilding Commission has advocated for a second allocation from the Peacebuilding Fund.

12. In order to reinforce their mutual reinforcement, the Peacebuilding Fund priority plan was revised by the national Peacebuilding Fund Steering Committee

and aligned to the country's Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding. Once approved by the Peacebuilding Support Office in New York, the priority plan and the projects submitted for funding will have direct relevance to the implementation of the Strategic Framework.

13. A decision on the second allocation from the Peacebuilding Fund is imminent. While recognizing the fact that the Fund operates independently from the Commission, it does have an important role to play in supporting the implementation of the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding, particularly in funding strategic activities and catalytic projects in the early phases of the country's engagement with the Commission.

14. On the other hand, the role of the Peacebuilding Commission will be to continue to marshal and mobilize resources by the international community in support of the Government's efforts in peacebuilding, as outlined in the Strategic Framework for Peacebuilding.

III. Composition of the delegation

15. The members of the delegation were as follows:

Jan Grauls, Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations, Chairperson of the country-specific configuration of the Peacebuilding Commission on the Central African Republic

Fernand Poukré-Kono, Permanent Representative of the Central African Republic

Pawel Herczyński, Deputy Permanent Representative of Poland

Michel Régis Onanga M. Ndiaye, First Counsellor, Gabon

Lulamah Rulumeni, Counsellor, South Africa

Isabelle Dumont, First Secretary, France

Filip Vanden Bulcke, First Secretary, Belgium

Kyoko Satomi, Third Secretary, Japan

Moussa Makan Camara, Ambassador, Permanent Observer, International Organization of la Francophonie (OIF)

Peacebuilding Support Office

Philip Helminger, Peacebuilding Officer

Annex II

Programme of the visit

Time	*Activity*
Thursday, 3 December 2009	
0900-0930	Special Representative of the Secretary General
1000-1100	United Nations Country Team
1115-1215	Committee of External Partners
1520-1610	Follow-up Committee to the Inclusive Political Dialogue
1615-1700	Civil society
1745-1845	Humanitarian and Development Partnership Team (HDPT)
Friday, 4 December 2009	
0900-0945	Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs
1015-1100	Prime Minister
1150	Minister of Communication, Reconciliation and Follow-up to the Inclusive Political Dialogue
1325	Meeting with a group of Parliamentarians
1520	Deputy Minister of Defence
Saturday, 5 December 2009	
0600-1600	Visit to Paoua
Sunday, 6 December 2009	
1000-1600	Visit to Berengo
Monday, 7 December 2009	
1030	Peacebuilding Commission Follow-up Committee
1245	Peacebuilding Fund Steering Committee
1515	Independent Electoral Commission
1700	Meeting with the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) mission in the Central African Republic

Time	*Activity*
Tuesday, 8 December 2009	
0930	First Vice-President of the National Assembly
1015-1300	High-level Forum — Biannual review of the Strategic Framework
1720	Internal debriefing following the High-level Forum
Wednesday, 9 December 2009	
1120-1220	Meeting with the participants of the Gender Workshop on the participation of women in the 2010 elections
1545-1645	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Steering Committee
Thursday, 10 December 2009	
1035	Press briefing
1645	End of mission debriefing